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LETTER, A,

TO THE

FREEMEN OF THE CITY OF  
COVENTRY.

On the subject of ENGLISHMEN'S  
BIRTHRIGHT, on that of ASSAS-  
SINATION, on that of the RIGHT  
TO RESIST OPPRESSION, on  
that of GENTLER MEANS.

Lancaster, State of Pennsylvania: North Ame-  
rica, this 12th day of February 1818.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW COUN-  
TRYMEN,

Since I addressed the *Journey-  
men and Labourers* of the King-  
dom, which was on the second of  
November, 1816 (only fifteen  
months ago!) what strange events  
have taken place! What impris-  
onings, what dungeons, what gags,  
what halters, what axes, have we  
seen! What emaciated bodies,  
what starving, what distracted  
lives and children, what trunkless  
heads streaming with blood!  
And, my friends, are these the  
result, are these the promised ef-  
fects, of a twenty five years war  
in defence, as we were told, of our  
LIBERTIES! Are these the  
promised effects of sacrifices, pub-  
lic spirit and valour, such as no  
nation ever made and exhibited  
before! Are these the blessings,  
the "blessed comforts," which we

were promised in peace, as the re-  
ward of all our sacrifices and all  
our toils in war! During that  
war, I paid, as I can prove, more  
than ten thousand guineas in taxes;  
and each of you, who was of the  
age of man, paid, at the very  
least, two hundred and fifty gui-  
neas, in taxes. Many of you, I  
dare say, paid more dearly in your  
persons, some in length of service  
as soldiers or sailors; some with  
your limbs; some have paid with  
their lives. The blood of the  
people has flowed in torrents; and,  
in torrents also have flowed the  
tears of fathers, mothers, wives  
and childrens. Great as these sacrifices were;  
severely as they were felt, we  
thought nothing of them, while we  
considered them as the means of  
securing the independence and li-  
berties of our country; and while  
we had incessantly made to our-  
selves the promise, that peace,  
whenever it came, should bring  
us and insure to us, the enjoyment  
of freedom and of a sufficiency to  
feed us and clothe us. But, what  
has the peace brought us? How  
has this solemn promise been kept?  
And where are now the liberties and  
laws, for the preservation of which  
we were called upon to yield our  
earnings and to shed our blood?  
At that Glorious Revolution,  
which drove out the tyrants of the

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House of Stuart, and which brought down justice upon the miscreant ministers and judges and spies who had been the abettors of that tyrant House; at that Revolution it was declared in an Act of the Parliament, that "the *Laws of England* are the *Birth-right* of the *People of England*." What is now become of that *Birth-right*? Who is it that can claim a *right* to take away that *Birthright*? And, if it can be *taken away*, what sort of a *Birthright* is it? ESAU sold his birthright for a mess of pottage; but we have not sold our birthright to Boroughmongers or any body else; and, my good honest friends, we will, in spite of all obstacles, persevere in our endeavours, until, with God's blessing, we enjoy this our birthright, which LORD COKE calls an "English-man's *best inheritance*." This great Lawyer did not make use of loose expressions. His Book is the greatest of all Law-Authorities. When he talked of an *inheritance* he meant what he said. And, what sort of inheritance is that, which can, at any time, be *taken away from us*? What would be said of you, or of me, if any of us were to call upon the parliament to take away the estates, which the Lords, or other great men, *inherit* from their forefathers? Should we not be accused of injustice the most odious? But, is *their inheritance*, then, more sacred than ours? And, you will always

observe, that, while any of us can be dungeoned at the pleasure of Sidmouth or Castlereagh, the Lords of one House and the Members of the other, *cannot* be so dungeoned!

Is it pretended, that the parliament can make *any thing* law? That they can change, at their pleasure, *the nature of our birth-right*? My Lord COKE says, that they *cannot*; for he expressly says, that any Act of parliament, "*which is contrary to Magna Charta, is null and void of itself*." And Magna Charta says, that *no man shall be imprisoned but according to the course of Law*; and *due course of Law*, means *due course of Common Law, or Law of the Land*; and this law requires an oath of accusation, a specific charge, the confronting of the accuser with the accused, and a trial, or release at the next regular Assizes or the next but one, at farthest. What is now become of this Law? What is become of Magna Charta? And why do we talk of it, if it can be thus set aside at pleasure? The parliament does not pretend to have the power of taking away any man's *estate*. It does not pretend to have the power of altering the *last will* of any man, however little he may be. Can it, then, have the power to take away the *inheritance* of the whole of the people? Can it have the power to take the *birthright* from the whole of us, while, too, its mem-

And these the friends of the Revolution, which drove out the tyrants of the



bers keep their own birthright? No: it has no such legal power. Whatever it has done in this way is *illegal*. Its acts of this sort are of themselves null and void; and all the deeds that have been perpetrated, or may be perpetrated, under those acts, are deeds of *violence*, for which the parties will have *legally to answer*, whenever the Law of the Land, our "*best inheritance*," shall, by our perseverance, and by God's blessing, be recovered and possessed.

In the meanwhile, permit me to offer some observations on the attempts, which the hirelings of the Boroughmongers have been making to represent all those, who have made a stand for the recovery of our birthright, and particularly me, as urging the people to commit *assassination*. You know well that this is false. You know well, that I have always most strongly recommended to the people to adhere to a *peaceable* and orderly line of conduct. You know well, that I have taken infinite pains to convince the people, that all *violence* was to be avoided, and that the *legal* course of *petition* was the only proper and rational course. This course has been cut off in a great degree; but, still I have never recommended *any other*; and this is well known to you all. I shall speak to you by-and-by about *the right of resisting oppression*, which is as much a *right* as the right to *breathe* is a

right, and this I shall clearly prove to you; but, first, I beg your attention to what I have to say, upon the subject of *assassination*. And here I must begin by inserting for your perusal an article from the *Courier* of the 28th of October last, and which article, I beseech you to read with attention; because, unless you do that, you will not be able clearly to understand what follows; and, besides, to arrive at *truth*, we ought always to listen patiently to what *both parties* have to say; and by the standard of *truth* I am always willing to be judged.

"There is another feature in the present times far more alarming and much more disgraceful to the nation: we mean the *bold and open manner in which assassination is constantly recommended in a weekly pamphlet, the darling of traitors, of EXTENSIVE CIRCULATION, and WRITTEN WITH VERY GREAT ABILITY*, in a style peculiarly adapted to delude the ignorant, to inflame the unwary. In *July last* that publication exhorted the people to obtain their rights *by any means*; and to shew that any means might be honourable, it quoted an instance wherein the Regent had knighted a person for stabbing a man with a carving-knife. When Mr. Perceval was assassinated, and Bellingham was executed, the same publication justified that assassination, and assassination generally. to a degree the most outrageous and disgusting. Some persons in Nottingham, too, particularly disgraced that town upon the same occasion, by the display of similar sentiments, and we naturally ask whether Brandreth was not tutored by these

means, to commit the murder of  
 which he has been guilty. Ten  
 days ago, the pamphlet alluded to  
 published the most sanguinary ex-  
 hortations that ever came from the  
 press, even of the press of Paris,  
 during the time of Robespierre. It  
 contained lists of proscriptions, with  
 calls for blood! blood! in every  
 page. This is not a new feature in  
 the productions of the writer, who  
 finds others can publish with impu-  
 nity, what he dare write, but dare  
 not stand responsible for, and  
 who bravely gives his name to  
 the world, while he takes his car-  
 case into safety across the Atlan-  
 tic. This is not a new feature in  
 the writings of that person, though  
 it grows hideously frightful with  
 age. During the Peace of Amiens,  
 he advised the assassination of Bu-  
 naparte, saying, Frenchmen should  
 attack the First Consul with another  
 instrument than a pen. In the  
 Parliamentary Debates it may be  
 seen, that Mr. Fox pronounced this  
 a most atrocious excitement to the  
 assassination of a Sovereign with  
 whom we were at peace, and that  
 were he on a Jury trying it as a  
 libel, he should most undoubtedly  
 pronounce the writer guilty. But  
 we live in other times. With the  
 Habeas Corpus Act suspended, such  
 publications go forth as quietly and  
 regularly as the postman, such is  
 the tyranny under which we live!  
 —Mr. Fox! he was an ignorant  
 man: he knew nothing of libels,  
 though Parliament passed, at his in-  
 stance, some silly sort of a thing  
 called a Libel Bill. This is a more  
 enlightened age. As Lord Gren-  
 ville would say, talk of such things  
 at this time o' day. We have  
 Lawyers far more enlightened upon  
 libels than Mr. Fox even was, and  
 they cannot discover a libel for the  
 soul of them. Libels are very trou-  
 ble some things to prosecute; such  
 a prosecution excites much public

attention, much party opposition;  
 a Jury may not give a verdict of  
 guilty, and a lawyer who has any  
 character to lose for knowledge of  
 law, may lose it. We have had  
 periodical publications called the  
 Spectator, the Tatler, the Guardian,  
 &c. and we now have weekly pub-  
 lications called the Whig, the Eng-  
 lishman, the Observer, &c.; but  
 we never, till one man appeared  
 among us, who introduced the Ame-  
 rican custom of writing under his  
 real name, had any publication en-  
 titled to be called 'The Assassin.'  
 And if assassinations are committed  
 in the manufacturing districts by  
 ignorant deluded men, who vend  
 that work, and think themselves  
 Reformers, whom should we blame  
 most? The writers of such a work,  
 the public officers who permit it, or  
 the deluded men? Respecting the  
 impunity of such a work, we may  
 say with Junius, 'Good men can-  
 not believe it, wise men cannot  
 account for it, and religious men  
 make it the last effort of their faith  
 not to repine at Providence.'

Now, my good friends, the first  
 thing that I, who am here at near-  
 ly four thousand miles from the  
 spot; the first thing that I learn  
 from this article, paid for by Cor-  
 ruption, is, that she has discovered,  
 all of a sudden, that the "Two-  
 penny trash," as the Borough-  
 mongers used to call it, is "writ-  
 ten with very great ability"! And,  
 I also find, that, though at this  
 distance, what I write here has, in  
 England, an "extensive circula-  
 tion." After this I can console  
 myself for the reproach of this  
 hired man, when he imputes my  
 retreat to cowardice. He com-  
 plains, that I have taken my



"carcase across the Atlantic;" and and well he may! For, if I had not so done, my writings would not now have had that "*extensive circulation*," which is one of the subjects of his alarm; or, rather, of the alarm of Corruption, whom I make tremble from a distance five hundred times farther than she can hear the thunders of heaven.

As to the charge, that I have ever recommended, or justified, assassination, what can be more false! If I had done it in the case of Mr. BELLINGHAM, when he killed PERCEVAL, what prevented my being prosecuted, seeing that I was then not only in England, but in prison; so that I was perfectly under the claws of the Attorney General? If it was done in the Number of the 18th of October last, which is the Register alluded to, why was not that Number prosecuted? But, the fact is, as you may see, that no sentiment of the sort is contained in that Number. What does the man mean, then, by "*lists of proscription*" and calls for blood! blood! "in every page"? In that Number I do, indeed, give an account of the base attempts of this same hired man, Stewart, and of Walter, Castles and others to take away the life of Mr. HUNT and other innocent men; I exhort my countrymen *not to forget* these things; I earnestly beseech some man of ability to make a book,

containing the *names* of all persons, judges, juries, witnesses, members, every body, who has acted any *conspicuous* part, good or bad, since the passing of the Gag and Dungeon Acts, but without stating any opinion, in the said book, as to the *merits* or *demerits* of the parties. In short, merely to make a *book* of all the actors, good or bad, in order, that, at a *future day*, we may have the best possible chance of *legally* obtaining *justice*. And this is what the hired man calls making out "*lists of proscription and death*!" I only want the conduct of every actor *to be remembered*; and, why should the hired man or his employers be *angry* at this? I most anxiously wish my own conduct to be well remembered. Why does he wish *his* to be forgotten? Corruption says, that all that has been done against the people is *right, just, lawful*; quite *constitutional*; quite *humane*; all for *our good*; *praiseworthy* in the highest degree. Very well, then, why is she so *angry* at the prospect of seeing the *Book*, which would contain the names of the *worthies*? Her anger arises from her *modesty*, I suppose. She loves to do good by stealth, and would *blush* to find that her kind and generous acts were recorded in a *book*! We must, my friends, get the better of her virgin bashfulness, and make the record in spite of her blushes.

But, you will see, my friends, that I am here accused, upon the authority of Mr. Fox, of having in 1803, or, during the Peace of Amiens, published a passage, instigating *Frenchmen* to assassinate Buonaparté. The accusation was *false*; but, true or false, the passage was written by the Right Honourable William Elliot, who, in return for tolerable good speeches that I used to make out for him, used to treat me, now-and-then, to a senseless bit of a paragraph, or a suggestion, which it was not very easy to refuse; and this fact I state as an illustration of that gentleman's gratitude, when, last winter, he talked of "the *Weekly Venom*." But, the *Courier* forgets another thing, which took place during the peace of Amiens, relative to Buonaparté. Mr. PELTIER, a *Frenchman*, who published in London, a Periodical Work, in French, put forth a poem, calling upon the people of France to kill Buonaparté. The French Ambassador complained of this. Mr. Peltier was prosecuted by the Attorney General, Perceval, and he was defended by Sir James M'INTOSH as ably every bit as poor Brandreth was defended by Cross. Mr. Peltier was found guilty; but he NEVER WAS BROUGHT UP FOR JUDGMENT, and a hair of his head never was touched!

This, however, was nothing to what happened soon afterwards.

There was a Frenchman, whose name was *Méhée de la Touche*, who came over to England in the spring of 1803, not long before the war was re-kindled. This man, who afterwards appeared to be an emissary of Buonaparté, came to me, under the pretence at first, of having discovered a new mode of teaching the French language, with regard to which he wanted my opinion and advice. He talked very furiously against Buonaparté, and at last, said, that he knew how he might be destroyed. I related, the next day, to Mr. WINDHAM, what MEHÉE had told me. Mr. WINDHAM advised me to have nothing to do with him, or to say to him. Therefore, MEHÉE never saw me any more, though he called at my house several times.

The war broke out, and soon after that, it was discovered, that MEHÉE had gone from England, and had been co-operating with our Envoys abroad, Mr. DRAKE and Mr. SPENCER SMITH. MEHÉE, who was faithful to his employer, betrayed these two cunning Envoys; and a grand exposure took place. The French government got all the letters of Drake and Smith; it detected and arrested Pichegru and others. It made a collection of the proofs, and Talleyrand laid them all before the Ambassadors of all the Powers of Europe, and before the American Ambassador. And, all these Ambassadors expressed their



HORROR at the conduct of Drake and Smith. But, all these Ambassadors must, to be sure, *have been deceived* in supposing, that Drake and Smith were in an assassination plot, seeing that these two Gentlemen were *never censured at home*, though ordered to *quit the courts at which they resided*, and seeing that the nation pays them good thumping pensions to this hour as "*late foreign ministers.*" That such pious and humane men as Lords Sidmouth and Liverpool, and as Perceval and Mr. Charles Yorke should have employed MEHEE to contrive the assassination of Buonaparté at the very moment when they had just caused Mr. PELTIER to be tried for having recommended such assassination, appears, to be sure, quite monstrous. To be guilty of hypocrisy and perfidy like this would place them many degrees above the Devil; and yet, on the other hand, how are we to account for Mehee's going directly from England to the borders of France, and there to be with Drake and Smith? Of this we are certain, that the French government distinctly accused Drake and Smith of the plot, and produced what it asserted to be proofs in their own hand writing; that no defence, or denial, was ever published on the part of Drake and Smith; and that they are now both on the English Pension list.

I am, at this moment, two hundred miles from my house in Long Island. Of course, I have not my books at hand, or I would state these matters more in detail. However, I have, I should think, said enough to convince Corruption, that she has gained nothing by referring me back to the *Peace of Amiens*.

Now, as to my opinions about assassination, I should not need to say any thing in addition to what was said in my Letter to WILBERFORCE, No. 32 of Vol. 32, published in London on the 15th of November last; but, this attack of Corruption has awakened new ideas upon the subject.

Before we determine whether a thing be *right* or *wrong*, we ought to come to a clear understanding as to *what the thing is*. What, then, is *assassination*? What is *this thing*, about which there is so much talk? The people of England will well remember, that when Mr. PLATT was hurt, or said to be hurt, by young Watson, he was said to have been ASSASSINATED, and young Watson was called AN ASSASSIN for months, and is, by Corruption's press, so called to this day; though Mr. PLATT is alive and merry, and is, I see, petitioning the City of London to grant him a *sum of money* for the *public services*, which he performed by being assassinated! When I was at Havre de Grace, about twenty-six years

ago, I saw a great crowd, and, from the midst of it, I heard a female voice crying: "*On m'assassine! On m'assassine!*" Being pretty tall and strong, and young enough to adventure in the rescuing of a woman in the act of being *assassinated*, I made my way through the throng; when, to my utter astonishment, I found it was an old bawd, whom the beadle was whipping for having kidnapped a country girl! Hence I learnt, that, in female French, *assassination* means a *smart farking* with some knotted string tied on to the end of a stick. There is a figure of rhetorick, which is called the *hyperbole*, and which, in plain English, means *falsehood*. Thus we say, that a girl's teeth are like *ivory* and her bosom like *snow*; that her cheeks are so much more beautiful than the rose and her arms so much fairer than the lily; that, when she approaches, those flowers hang their heads with shame and mortification. These are falsehoods, though, at about eighteen, we almost believe them to be truths. Equally false would it be to say, that the hearts of the Boroughmongers and those of Stewart and Oliver are as black as soot; for, there can be no doubt that they are red, like the hearts of other people. These falsehoods, however, are harmless. They *deceive nobody*; but, when this figure of speech has been so much used by any one as for him to

employ it not as a *figure*, but as a *reality*, then it becomes mischievous; and into this habit Corruption seems to have fallen with regard to the use of the word *assassination*. Hence it is that she described Mr. PLATT as having been assassinated, and that she now talks of my urging the people to commit acts of assassination, when I only urge them *to make a book* to record the names of all the actors in the present scenes in England.

Before we quit Mr. PLATT for ever, let us endeavour to do him *justice*. I said, at the time, and I have frequently said it since, that I did not believe that he was hit by any charge of a pistol, or that he was ever seriously hurt; and, now I say, that I am convinced, that that opinion was correct. He escaped *over a high wall* after having been *assassinated*. He was said to be *mortally* wounded. He did *not die*. I called, at the time, for *some surgeon's certificate*. None appeared. His friend, the COURIER, told us, from time to time, that the wound *discharged* a great deal. As we came pouring on with *petitions for reform*, the wound made more and more copious *discharges*. When Preston and his companions came to be tried at the Old Bailey, the wound began *discharging* again. When Hooper was acquitted at the Old Bailey, the wound *discharged prodigiously*; and when the brave Cashman was hanged it poured forth like the



mouth of a common sewer. It kept discharging upon every important occasion for many months. Its last discharge was *during the trial of Dr. WATSON*; but, having discharged in vain upon that occasion as well as upon the occasion of Mr. Wooller's Trial, it, all of a sudden, dried up; and, out comes the murdered, the assassinated, Mr. PLATT in the character of a petitioner for money to compensate him for his assassination! The City has, it seems, rejected his petition; but, if Corruption do not give him a place upon some of her lists, she must be a most ungrateful hag; for, I will venture to say, that his wound, with its gapings and dischargings, has served her more essentially than Oliver, Castles, Stewart, Stoddart, Wm. Gifford and Southey all put together.

By perceiving what assassination *is not*, we make an approach towards perceiving what it is. It is, then, *a killing of some person*. It is not a killing in war, or in self-defence, for that is *justifiable homicide*; it is not a killing by accident, or in error, or unintentionally, or from sudden impulse proceeding from provocation, and immediately succeeded by sorrow, for this is *manslaughter*; it is a killing premeditated, and so is *murder*; but besides this, it is a killing, performed *slyly*, and not to get at or secure property in any shape, but to satisfy a feeling of

revenge, or *hatred*, and which feeling is in itself *unjust* either altogether or in degree. Thus, when a man stabs, or shoots, another because he suspects him of unlawful commerce with his wife, as is frequently the case in Italy, it is an *assassination*. In short, assassination is a killing from feelings of *private revenge*, when the feelings of revenge are *unjust*, and WHEN (supposing the feelings themselves to be just) the LAWS AFFORD THE MEANS OF REDRESS: and it is a *sly* and *secret* killing; for, otherwise, the killer ventures his own life, and cannot be called an *assassin*, according to the sense in which that word has always been used in England, where, thank God, the *word* has, until of late, seldom been imputed to any body. The very idea of *assassination* is new to the mass of the people of England, and it has been introduced to their minds by the *conscious guilt* of the Boroughmongers and their spies and writers, who are, indeed, both writers and spies. None of the writers, or speakers, on the side of the people, have ever proposed, or talked of *assassination*, or of *killing* of any sort. Why, then, are the Corrupt *afraid* of being killed? Why is the fleeing thief afraid of every moving thing that he sees in the night? Why do robbers and murderers see halters and gibbets in their sleep?

Of *assassination*, therefore, it becomes us all to entertain the utmost degree of horror. Indeed, it is a thing that Englishmen have no conception of. Their mode of seeking revenge for private injuries is open and manly. They do not stab their enemy in the dark, like the gloomy Italian slave. But, as to the *combatting*, the *attacking*, the *resisting of Oppressors*, that is another matter, and of that matter I will now speak to you very freely.

TO RESIST OPPRESSION is a RIGHT. It must be a right belonging to all mankind; and, those who acknowledge that they possess it not, must also acknowledge themselves to be upon a level with the brute creation; they must acknowledge themselves to be the *mere property* of others. Nay, if a man give up his right to resist oppression, he puts himself far beneath the brutes; for, strike a dog and he will bite, if he can. The bull is not baited without resistance; the horse will kick if you use him ill; the fowls will peck at you; and "tread upon a worm, it *will turn*," if it can do nothing else. The doctrine of *non-resistance*, therefore, places those who subscribe to it below the brute and even below the worm.

Indeed, what can be so monstrous as to suppose, that a whole people are bound, or can be bound, either legally or in conscience, to

submit quietly to *any thing* and *every thing* that those who happen to be possessed of power *may be able to do* to such people! If the Congress of this country were to pass what they might call a law to order all husbands to cut off their wives' breasts, must the husbands obey? If they were to pass what they might call a law, authorizing a band of ruffians to go and take away one half of every man's money, goods, and estate. Must the people submit? Would it be *criminal* to *resist* this band of ruffians? If, violating the fundamental laws of the land, the Congress were to send ruffians to seize whomsoever they pleased and to cram the seized parties into caverns in the woods, there to be kept at discretion, and, if an American, so seized, or attempted to be seized, were to *kill the ruffians*, would he be thought an *assassin* or a *murderer*? And, if the son of a father so seized, seeing no hope of redress in any other way, were to go and stab, or shoot, the employers of the ruffians, would such son be an *assassin* or a *murderer*? If he would, then would the people of America be far, very far, beneath the beasts that perish. They would be the *property* of the Congress. They would be *live-stock* property, deprived of the rights of beasts; for, as I observed before, beasts, and even insects and reptiles, *do resist*, and, if they do not always inflict vengeance,



they seldom fail to shew their just resentment of ill-usage. When we see a man ill-treating any dumb creature, and when the creature, in return, gives him a gore, a kick, or a bite, do we not exclaim, "*that serves him right*"? And yet, are we to call a people *assassins*, if they take vengeance, in the only way left in their power, of a Congress that should have violated all law, and sent forth ruffians to rob and seize and incarcerate and kill the people? SELF-PRESERVATION is the first law of nature: and, the Laws of every country conform themselves to this principle. If my house be on fire, and I, in order to save my life, jump out of my window and fall, or alight, upon some very valuable thing of my neighbour, he can, though he be thereby ruined, recover *no damage* from me, seeing that the jump was necessary to save my life. According to the *ancient Law* it was not deemed theft, if a man took from another food to prevent himself from starving. SELF-DEFENCE is, according to the laws of every country, held to be not only *legal* but *laudable*; that is to say, self-defence against *unlawful violence*. And, if the Congress were to pass a thing called a law, which would send forth ruffians to violate all the fundamental laws of the land, would you call the people of America *assassins*, or *MURDERERS*, if they, for self-preservation and

in self-defence, should resist, and in resisting, *kill* these ruffians? If you would, then there is an end to all notions of liberties and rights and laws: the mass of the people are beneath the brute creation, and their masters may starve, beat, or kill them at pleasure. Talk of *blasphemy*, indeed! What blasphemy is so horrible as that of pretending that a few men have a *divine right* to treat a whole people like beasts, and that, if the people *resist*, and, in resisting, kill those who would kill them, such people are *assassins*?

Oh, no! my friends, "man-kind," as JUDGE BLACKSTONE observes in his Commentaries, "mankind are not thus to be *insulted*." God is not thus to be blasphemed by imputing to him the settled design of filling the world with rational beings, in order that they might be treated and considered as brutes. In my letter to WILBERFORCE, I asked that piece of surprizing sanctity, whether he regarded MOSES, JEHU, and Jael as assassins. The first killed an Egyptian tyrant and buried him in the sand. The second tumbled Queen Jezebel from a window, and dogs licked her blood, because, because *what*? Because she had contrived to take away Naboth's life by the means of FALSE WITNESSES, and (mark the fact!) on a pretended charge of BLASPHEMY! Jael drove a nail through the head of a

cruel tyrant while he slept; and, for this act, "blessed was Jael amongst women." Were these celebrated persons *assassins*? Are Moses and Jehu and Jael amongst the *damned*? Let us hear an answer to these questions. Let us have a *Yes*, or a *No*; or let the advocates for the *divine right of oppression* hold their blasphemous tongues.

But, what says the history, what say the laws, of our own country, as to this right to *resist oppression*? General Washington's character is frequently extolled even in the Houses of Parliament; yet, what an *assassin* was he, if resistance of oppression be not a *right*! However, to come nearer home; to come quite home, is not the king an *Usurper* and are we not all *rebels*, if this be not a *right*? And was not the "Glorious Revolution" a most foul and wicked rebellion? These facts are so notorious, that it seems unnecessary to state them. Let us come, then, to something more specific and precise.

King James the Second violated the fundamental laws of the land; that is to say, his advisers, his counsellors, his abettors, did it; for, as to *himself*, he did not oppress the people with his *own hands*. There was a *conspiracy* against him; and, the result, the just and happy result; that he and his family were set aside for ever, and the present family were ap-

pointed to supply their place. The *means* made use of were, *conspiring against him*, and, finally, bringing over foreigners to assist the people of England to fight against him and his army. These were the means; and were the persons engaged in this undertaking *assassins*? Before things came to this pass, dreadful acts were committed upon the people. The bloody Judges were at work, for a long while, with their halters and gibbets and axes. They carried death and destruction about in their train. Juries were packed and sheriffs were bribed. SIR THOMAS ARMSTRONG, when condemned by the bloody JEFFERIES, said, "*My blood be upon your head!*"—"Let it! Let it!" said JEFFERIES, "*I am clamour-proof.*" But, this ruffian, who had risen, at last, from *Recorder of London* to be *Lord Chancellor*, escaped, in the end, that gibbet on which he had put so many innocent men, only because the people, too impatient for vengeance, kicked and cuffed him to death. Were these people *assassins* too as well as all the Lords and all the Gentlemen, who assisted in bringing in king William?

After this Revolution had taken place, there were men to contend, that it was *unjustifiable*; that the right of the Stuarts was *divine*; and that the right to *resist oppression* could never exist. A Doctor of the Church of England, whose



name was **SACHEVEREL**, preached a sermon, in which he *denied this right*; and though this was about twenty years after the Revolution, he was *impeached* for this by the House of Commons, tried, *found guilty*, and *punished* by the House of Lords. In the reign of William and Mary, a printer, named **ANDERTON**, was accused of printing a *pamphlet*, in which *the right of resistance was denied*. He was tried for *high treason*, found guilty, condemned, and *executed*. What! was it high treason, then, to deny the existence of this right? Was a man to have his head cut off and his bowels ripped out and his quarters gibbeted for *denying this right*, in 1693; and is it now a crime to say, that resistance of oppression is a right? I could appeal, my friends, to writers of the highest fame; I could appeal to the writers on politics and law; I could appeal to speeches of Lords, Commoners, and Kings; but, I choose rather to appeal to these solemn and awful decisions of the High Court of Parliament, and of the Court of King's Bench.

It is clear, then, that, not only nature, reason, common justice, common sense, say that this right must be possessed by every people, but that it is distinctly claimed and established by the laws and usages of England. The question, therefore, as far as relates to our present purpose is,

ought this right **NOW** to be **EXERCISED** by the people of England? As against the *King*, or *Royal Family*, I say distinctly, that, in my opinion, it *ought not*; because. I can trace to *their will* no acts of oppression. And, I do not say, that the right ought to be now exercised at all; because, I am not present to know what is the precise state of things, and because I ought to urge nobody to run risks that I am not present to share. I say, therefore, upon this point, what **JUDGE BLACKSTONE** says; and that is, that the right to resist oppression always exists, but *that those who compose the nation at any given time must be left to judge for themselves when oppression has arrived at a pitch to justify the exercise of such right*.

If, however, I were disposed to retaliate on the **COURTIER**, I could here make a triumphant use of his appeal to **MR. FOX**. He appeals to the *wisdom and justice* of that gentleman against me; but, he appears to have forgotten, that, when the Habeas Corpus Act was suspended under Pitt, Mr. Fox distinctly declared, in his place in Parliament, that **RESISTANCE** was, from that moment, **A QUESTION OF PRUDENCE**; that is to say, that the state of things *justified the exercise of the right*, and that the only question for the people was, whether it was *prudent* for them to enter upon that exercise! I

have not the parliamentary debates at hand; but, I pledge my word, that this statement is, as to all its meaning, perfectly correct. Well, then, if Mr. Fox was a *wise* and *just* man, and a *loyal subject*; and, if he thought and said, that Resistance would have been just and proper, because the dungeon measure was adopted in a *time of war* and almost of *invasion*; what would that *rise* and *just* man have said *now*, when the same measure is adopted in a time of profound peace with all the world, and that, too, at the end of a twenty-five years of expence and of blood in **DEFENCE OF OUR LIBERTIES?**

However, leaving my countrymen to act according to their own well-weighed opinions, I am, from the present impressions of my mind, for exhausting first every resource of means *more gentle* in their nature; and, it is of some, or rather, of *one*, of those means, that it remains for me to speak to my countrymen in general, and especially to you, *the Freemen of the City of Coventry*.

You will, at once perceive, that it is my intention to offer myself to you *as a person to represent you in parliament*; but, the motives of that offer; the grounds upon which I proceed in making it; the hopes which I should entertain as to the effects of its success; these must be the subject of a future Letter: and, in the meanwhile, I remain,

with a heart and mind which no scenes of happiness and no prospects of gain can ever, for one moment, withdraw from a devotion to the liberties, the happiness and the honour of England,

Your faithful friend,

and obedient servant,

WM. COBBETT.

P. S. It will be seen by the date of this letter, that I am 200 miles from home. I have been at *Harrisburgh*, which is the seat of government in Pennsylvania. I shall return to that place in a few days; and I may not be at home before the end of this month. The business I am upon is of a nature very interesting to the people of this country, and also to the people of England.—I have just read, in an American newspaper, a very short account of Mr. HONE's acquittal on a charge of **BLASPHEMY**. This has given me great pleasure. There was no more of blasphemy in the publication, than there was of *witchcraft*; and our grandchildren will be astonished, that any man was found so destitute of shame as to pretend to think the thing blasphemous. *CANNING* and Mr. *GEORGE ELLIS* and Mr. *FRERE*, through their tool, *WILLIAM GIFFORD*, published, in their newspaper (which was set up and paid for out of the *public money*) a parody on



one of the *Psalms*, which is the word of God, and not of man, as the *Litany* is. But, besides this, CANNING's parody contained monstrous abuse of the late Duke of Bedford and others; whereas Mr. HONE's parody contained abuse of nobody. Yet CANNING's parody was so far from being prosecuted, that it was circulated at the public expence, and WILLIAM GIFFORD had a good fat *sinecure* given him for being the agent in the blasphemous work.—I see an intimation, that some of the Dungeoned people are to be released. Perhaps this is to form a ground for a confidence in the lenient disposition of the dungeoners! Some trick, or shift, will be resorted to, I dare say, for continuing the dungeon Bill in full force. A short repeal, perhaps, and then a new enactment. I hope, that the dungeoned people, if let out, will not suffer themselves to be frightened out of the country. They have seen the worst of the thing, they may be assured. It must mend, or go to pieces.—The Proclamation of neutrality with regard to the struggle in South America is just what I expected. The THING (I do not know what to call it!) cannot go to war any more. It cannot help the Petticoat gentleman without going to war; and it cannot help the Revolutionists without blowing up all its own principles about *Legitimacy*; that is to say, *Divine Right*! So that

the THING does not know what to do to be at. If the THING were wise, it would, however, take the side of the Revolutionists; but the THING is foolish. I wonder what the THING has said to my *Petition to the Prince Regent*! How it would make the foolish THING stare! The THING waits patiently, it says, for the effects of "the healing hand of time." Poor, foolish THING! It cannot see yet, then, that time is its greatest enemy? Verily it is a very silly as well as a very wicked THING!—As to "the revival of prosperity," about which there will have been so much said before this time, it is all deception. To be sure the misery after a good crop will be a little less than after a bad one. But, restoration to prosperity there can be none, until a great change take place with regard to the amount of the taxes and their distribution. Until this take place the national misery must be on an average unabated.—I am aware, that the Parliament may have been dissolved, and the General Election all over, before this reaches England. That will make no difference in my proceedings. I intend to address to you 26 Letters, and mark them from A to Z. I rely upon that time, which the THING thinks is at work for it. One half of the Boroughmongers, who are now forty, will have been killed by their gluttony and drunkenness and debauchery, be-

fore I shall be an old man. So that I am in *no hurry* about the matter, especially as we have now such a fine string of chances before us—I see, that our old friend, PERRY, does not know very well what to be at. He professes still to stick to the principles of the “immortal Mr. Fox;” but, he does not say a word about Mr. Fox’s exhortation to *resist oppression*. That is too delicate a matter, I suppose? And Mr. PERRY is a *most delicate* gentleman. He, in one of his papers, in November, *congratulates* his readers on “the *improvement* in the *revenue*.” What a wise-acre it is! Just as if the revenue had not been *improving* for these 25 years, till, at last, it has so improved as to fall 15 millions a year *below the expenditure*, according to the Minister’s *confession*, and 25 millions according to the *real fact*, as I will most clearly prove to my intended constituents.—In 1814, when there was a Whig-Meeting, in Hampshire, *to petition for the repeal of the Property Tax*, I, seconded by Mr. HUNT, proposed

to add a prayer for reducing the *army*, the *salaries*, the *pensions*, and the *interest of the Debt*, called national. The Whigs rejected this; but, we told them then, that one of these things must be: *first*, that the *Property Tax must continue in Peace*; or, *second*, that the interest of the Debt, called national, *must be reduced*; or, *third*, that there must be *loans in time of peace*.—This last has been adopted. But, I will not anticipate the subjects of my future Letters to you, my friends of Coventry, in which Letters I will make all these matters as clear as the acts of Corruption, which have, you know, long been as clear “*as the Sun at noon day*.”

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